

# Goodland company ships pinto beans to Haiti

By Ron Wilson,

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On Tuesday, Jan. 12, a huge earthquake devastated Haiti. Many charities and governments responded quickly. The United States provided one of the first and largest food shipments, including a supply of pinto beans from western Kansas. In today's Kansas Profile, we'll learn about a rural Kansas entrepreneur who was a part of producing those beans.

Alan Townsend is president of the J. Hawkens Bean Company at Goodland. He is a pinto bean producer and a director of the 21st Century Bean Processing LLC. Alan has deep roots in rural Kan-

sas, as the fifth generation on the family farm near Goodland. Son Ross, an incoming freshman at K-State, would be the sixth.

During the 1950s, Alan's grandfather started raising pinto beans and other dry edible beans. "The prime growing area for these beans is far western Kansas because it is a dry weather crop," Alan said.

In 1999, a group called the 21st Century Alliance organized what was called a new generation co-operative to handle marketing and processing of the dry edible beans in Alan's region. In 2003, that business changed its business structure to become a limited liability company. Today, 21st Century is USDA's second leading provider of pinto beans in the entire nation.

Alan remains a director of the

LLC, and three years ago, he developed his own label to market his beans privately. He pays a fee to the LLC for the handling and cleaning which it performs on his beans.

Alan's daughter is in Nashville. Through a friend of hers in an ad agency there, Alan had the agency develop some possible designs for his private label. One design called the product J. Hawkens Beans and featured a mythical character in a cowboy hat and plaid work shirt.

The ad agency representatives flew to Denver to show Alan their designs. He met them at the airport and drove them to the field where bean harvest was underway. When they stopped at the combine, a local man named John Golden happened to step out to meet them in his cowboy hat and work shirt. The ad

agency rep said, "Oh my God - it's J. Hawkens."

The resemblance was purely coincidental, but it did give some weight to the selection of the J. Hawkens brand and logo as the design to be chosen. Now Alan is marketing his product over the Internet at [www.jhawkensbeans.com](http://www.jhawkensbeans.com).

Bean production and processing has been an asset for the local economy. Bulk processing and receiving of beans is done at Sharon Springs. Further cleaning and retail packaging is done at the nearby unincorporated town of Ruleton, with a population of perhaps 30 people. Now, that's rural.

Health benefits of pinto beans have given the product a boost in the market place. With their high fiber and significant amounts of folate,

magnesium, and potassium, pinto beans help prevent heart disease and can potentially reduce the risk of heart attacks. Two recent studies suggest that eating beans can lower the risk of developing a colon adenoma, a non-cancerous tumor that can progress into colon cancer.

Since dietary fiber stabilizes blood sugar, pintos are a recommended fiber source for diabetics.

One serving of pinto beans provides 58 percent of the recommended fiber and a quarter of the recommended level of protein daily. Pinto beans also increase energy levels by helping the body replenish iron and are a good source for the B vitamins riboflavin and niacin which are said to help maintain memory.

"This health thing has brought beans to the fore front," Alan said.

Pinto beans are also a natural, ready-to-eat food. "All it takes is fire and water and you have a meal," he added. This fact makes pinto beans especially appealing as an emergency food, such as in the food shipments to Haiti.

It's time to leave Haiti, where a shipment of beans from rural western Kansas was part of one of the first food shipments after the earthquake. We commend Alan Townsend of J. Hawkens Bean Company and 21st Century Bean Processing LLC for making a difference by producing and adding value to this crop. This is one producer who knows beans about his business.

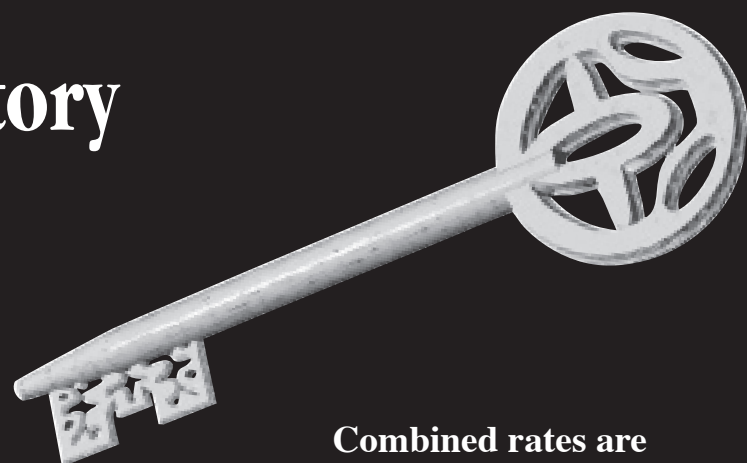
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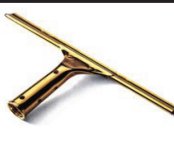
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